



# ARCTIC EMPIRES

*Frank Illingworth describes a New World opened up by Air Transport*

**A**IR transport is the foundation of the new polar empires now being built by the U.S.S.R., the United States and Canada. The main Alaskan and Yukon towns are linked by the famous Alaska and Richardson Highways; a narrow road crawls up the spine of Finland to Petsamo, the (now Russian) port on the edge of the Barents Sea; roads link the Soviet Arctic towns, Igarka and Kirovsk, grown in seventeen years from hamlets of 43 and 28 inhabitants to industrial centres of 23,000 and 40,000 people respectively; sea convoys pass through the fabulous North-East Passage and along the Soviet's Arctic seaboard; all this and much more has been accomplished in the Far North, but without freight planes the colonisation of the Arctic would still be far from fulfilment.

Aviation has transformed the industrial development of the polar regions from a painfully slow process to a startling realisation, if as yet only an immature realisation.

The Russians are shy about their success in Arctic colonisation. Foreign sailors are not permitted to join the summer convoys through the grinding floe-ice of the North-East Passage, eastern gateway to the new towns illuminated by arclights throughout the winter-long polar night; the "greenhouses" built in frozen earth; the vanadium mines; coal, copper, nickel and iron mines; the lumber mills powered by wind-generated electricity; the collective farms growing a species of wheat specially developed for planting in the Far North; and the chain of meteorological stations built to facilitate air communications.

Russians are shy about all this. But news travels fast and far, even in the Arctic, and it is reported that the

Soviet's chain of weather stations stretches from the naval and air base of Petrovsk (on the Kamchatka Peninsula overlooking the Aleutian Islands in the North Pacific) all along the Soviet's Arctic shore to the desolate island of Nova Zemlaya (embedded in the Ice Barrier) and across the Polar Ocean to Barentsburg in Spitzbergen.

It is by no means certain that the last-mentioned Russian met. station will form part of the new chain of weather stations, including floating met. ships in the Atlantic, planned by PICAQ (ICAO, now that the "Provisional" has been dropped). It is equally uncertain whether Atlantic air services will gain an advantage from the Russian robot met. stations planted on the sea-ice that drifts across the roof of the world from Siberian waters through the Kara Sea and across the North Pole to the Bering Straits (separating Siberia and Alaska).

## Soviet Strategy

How many meteorological stations and air bases the Soviet has on the North Siberian coast is a matter for conjecture. But at least thirteen are reported to be as large as any in Alaska and Arctic Canada, excluding Goosebay; and Russia is now seeking to extend this chain to Spitzbergen, the Norwegian islands midway between Murmansk and Iceland.

Why should Moscow want to fortify this desolate archipelago?

One reason is that Spitzbergen is only eight to ten hours' flying-time from Canada's uranium mines. Another reason is the islands' strategic position in relation to American

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CH 15411